



Arctic *National Wildlife Refuge*

Strategies for Minimizing Your Impacts

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in the far northeast corner of Alaska, remains much as it has for thousands of years. Its austere beauty is driven by untamed forces of nature that continue to this day.

These lands, and the plants and animals that live here, evolved knowing only the light step of occasional nomadic hunters. Today, many more people come than in the past. This vast and remote wilderness is a place of great power, but it is exceptionally fragile and can be damaged.

Whether your plans include hunting, hiking, or other activities, you have something in common with all Refuge visitors. Your experiences will be intertwined with the wildlife and habitats the Refuge is meant to preserve, and your practices will influence the future well-being of this place.



Presented here are a set of principles and strategies you can use to minimize impacts during your time within the Arctic Refuge—actions you can take so that signs of your presence will disappear within a year. These strategies will ensure this awe-inspiring, wild place remains unblemished for future generations.

Those who are here now, and those who will come in the future, hope that you make a personal commitment to minimize

signs of your presence within this magnificent but demanding wilderness.

Plan ahead:

You will best be able to limit your impacts on the Refuge if you prepare wisely and thus avoid unanticipated actions that could result in resource damage. Pack the necessary clothing and equipment that will keep you warm, safe, and well-fed. Leave your itinerary with family or friends.

- **Design your route** to accommodate the skill level and physical ability of each member within your group. Remember that foot travel in the Refuge is often slow-going over unstable terrain. Hiking a specific distance here may take two to four times as long as it does on groomed trails elsewhere.
- **Plan to be completely self-sufficient.** Cell phones do not have coverage across the Refuge, and satellite phones may not work in mountainous terrain or harsh weather conditions.
- **Reduce packaging** to limit trash. When original packaging is excessive, many people repackage their dry food into plastic zip bags.

Respect Solitude:

In contrast to the every-day stresses of modern living, the Refuge is an ideal destination for the many visitors seeking solitude and restoration. Although the Refuge is vast and remote, certain areas tend to receive a lot of public use—such as aircraft access points. If solitude is your primary concern, you may wish to arrange your trip to avoid times and locations of high use.

- Be sensitive to other visitors' potential

desires for solitude by **minimizing disruptive noises and being aware of your effects on others.**

Limit Group Size:

Large groups may leave especially noticeable and lasting impacts on Arctic landscapes. Refuge employees and research project leaders limit their groups to the fewest necessary participants. Commercial guides are required to limit their group size. We encourage private users to do the same.

- The recommended **maximum group size is 7 for land travelers.**
- The recommended **maximum group size is 10 for water travelers.**

Naturalize Camp Sites:

Rocks in the outline of a tent or fire ring; wood gathered into an ordered pile; crushed vegetation—these are some visible signs that campers have been to a site. We suggest the following practices to limit signs of your presence on the landscape.

- **Naturalize the site when you leave** (undo site changes by repositioning rocks, logs, etc. to their original locations; wiping out footprints in the sand; and dispersing fire ash; etc.).
- Choose **shoes with low-tread soles** to avoid trail formation and vegetation wear throughout your camping area.

Protect Vegetation:

A few areas of the Refuge receive concentrated use, resulting in trail formation and trampled vegetation. Consider taking the following measures to limit further deterioration and allow impacted areas to heal.

- **Camp and walk on durable surfaces** (rock, gravel, sand, snow, annually-flooded riverbar, etc.) or on sturdy vegetation when these are available.
- **Disperse use when in pristine areas.** For example, when walking in a group, spread out in a fan pattern to help prevent trail formation, and when camping, relocate if signs of wear begin to appear.
- **Avoid worn areas to allow their recovery.** If you can tell that someone has placed a tent there before, or if a faint path is emerging in the vegetation, choose another location. An exception is at aircraft landing sites where practical alternatives do not exist. Here it may be wisest to use existing camp sites and trails to keep impacts from spreading.

Dispose of Human Waste:

Human waste and toilet products are visible at some high-use locations within the Refuge. Moist towelettes and wipes are particularly persistent in the north. Out of courtesy to others, we recommend the following tactics.

- **Pack out toilet paper, towelettes, and sanitary products, or burn them completely to ash.** Never bury these items. If buried, animals and seasonal thawing will unearth them, and some take years to deteriorate in arctic conditions.
- Human waste should be **buried 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet away** from camps, trails and waterways. Many visitors pack a light-weight trowel to dig these “cat-holes.”
- **Consider carrying out your human waste** from high-use areas where it is accumulating.

Remove Trash:

Bits of plastic, crushed cans, and tangles of fishing line don't belong in the Refuge.

- **Pack out all trash, or burn it completely** to powdery, white ash and pack out any remaining unburned pieces (foil, etc.).

Reduce Fire Impacts:

Fires, though allowed, are not recommended within the Refuge because trees grow very slowly in the far north, and wood is scarce in some areas. Visitors who have campfires should take special care to ensure that their fires do not leave visible scars on the land.

- Use of **white gas or similar fuel for heating and cooking** is encouraged.
- If you feel the need for a campfire, **burn limited amounts of dead, downed wood** in ways that will not cause lasting impacts (use fire pans or blankets, mound fires, etc.).
- **Remove evidence of your campfire** by burning wood completely to powdery, white ash, and by dispersing the collected materials and ash when cold.

Protect Wildlife:

Observing wildlife in their natural setting is one of the most rewarding aspects of a Refuge experience, but if their behavior is changed by your presence you are too close. An animal that associates humans with food rewards may become tolerant of people, become a nuisance, or have to be destroyed.

- **Keep food away from wildlife.** Reduce the chances of dangerous encounters by not allowing food scraps or food odors to attract wildlife. We encourage you to disperse dishwashing water away from camp, and to use approved bear-resistant containers to store food and trash.
- **View animals from a distance** using a spotting scope, binoculars, or camera with telephoto lens, etc.

Preserve the Landscape:

Whether observed close at hand or viewed as broad vistas, the landscapes of the Refuge present spectacular sights of sublime beauty. It is an easy courtesy to others to limit the sights and sounds of your presence, and to leave things as you find them, for others to discover for themselves.

- **Minimize visual impacts** to others by using equipment and gear of muted colors. (Contrasting colors may be necessary for safety in certain circumstances.)
- **Leave natural objects and private property undisturbed.**

Those coming to the Refuge hope to see it undisturbed and full of natural beauty. We all share responsibility to preserve this wild place—the responsibility to have a limited impact on the land and to protect the intricate web of life it supports—so that those in the future may be renewed and inspired in their turn by this majestic wilderness.

Thank you for your efforts to limit your impacts on the Arctic Refuge.



David Prestigione

The National Wildlife Refuge System conserves fish, wildlife, and their habitats for all Americans. This network of lands provides opportunities for wildlife-dependent activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, and wildlife observation.

The Arctic Refuge was established to protect wildlife, wilderness and recreational values, to ensure adequate water quality and quantity, and to provide continued subsistence opportunities to local residents.

